



SENATOR KIM ELTON

SB 118

Sponsor Statement

“An Act establishing a fee for disposable plastic bags distributed by retail sellers of goods or services to consumers to carry away or protect goods; and establishing the Alaska litter and marine debris reduction and recycling fund.”

Globally we consume almost 1 million plastic bags per minute or 500 billion plastic bags annually. The USA consumes 100 billion plastic shopping bags annually – equal to about 12 million barrels of oil. In the USA, four out of five grocery bags are plastic. US retailers spend an estimated \$4 billion on disposable plastic bags annually, the cost of which is passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices.

An estimated 8 billion pounds of plastic bags, wraps and sacks end up as waste every year in the USA alone – most in landfills. Once made, single use high-density polyethylene plastic bags will exist in some form or another for up to 1,000 years. As litter, they break down into small particles and contaminate land and water.

Plastic bags don't biodegrade, they photo-degrade. They're broken down into smaller and smaller toxic bits which contaminate soil and waterways and enter the food chain where animals accidentally ingest them. Each year, more than 100,000 marine mammal deaths can be attributed to ingesting plastic bags mistaken for food. The plastic bags choke the animals or block their intestines. On land, other animals accidentally ingest plastic bags when foraging for food. A 2001 paper by Japanese researchers reported that plastic particles act like a sponge for toxic chemicals, soaking up substances like DDE (a breakdown product of DDT) in greater concentrations than the surrounding seawater and poisoning marine mammals when accidentally ingested.

Based on the population of our state in 2006 (670,053), one less plastic bag used per person per year would reduce waste in Alaska by approximately 10,050 pounds and save in disposal costs. Over its lifetime, one reusable (canvas, etc.) grocery bag can eliminate approximately 1,000 plastic grocery bags.

In 2001, Ireland was the first country to institute a plastic bag tax (PlasTax). It reduced consumption by 90 percent, and generated \$9.6 million in the first year. It is anticipated the Alaska experience will be similar to the Irish experience. If so the state collection could provide up to \$1.825 million per year for the purpose of marine and litter debris cleanup.

ALASKA SENATE

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